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Admiral Stansfield Turner

Atlanta City Forum

October 6, 1977

CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, we are indeed fortunate this morning to have as our first speaker in the Forum series Admiral Stansfield Turner. I believe our country is also fortunate in having Admiral Turner as head of the Central Intelligence Agency, for he brings to it the energy and enthusiasm which has permeated his career from a very early point in time. Admiral Turner is a native of the state of Illinois. When it came time to go to college, he entered Amherst College and, after two years, entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. He had a rather distinguished career at Annapolis in that he graduated number one from his class and was a classmate of President Carter. He continued his education by taking post graduate instruction at Oxford University in England where he was a Rhodes Scholar.

From that time forward, he has been very actively engaged in a naval career, rising steadily through the ranks to the rank of full Admiral in 1974. His career in the Navy has been replete with accomplishments. And it would be a tedious task to enumerate them all.

Suffice it to say, he has had fleet command of the 2nd Fleet. He has been president of the Naval College of War, where he instituted drastic and massive reforms and changes to upgrade and make more comprehensive the program presented at that college. He was called to service by Governor Carter -- I beg your pardon; he is now President Carter -- during this past election to head this nation's Central Intelligence Agency.

I think it's important to note that the Central Intelligence Agency has come under a significant amount of criticism, justifiably or unjustifiably, throughout the past nine years when the word "national security" and other such things have taken on connotations that people don't take it seriously -- perhaps they once did -- but are very crucial to our continued national existence.

It wasn't so long ago that the intelligence gathering forces of this country were less than sophisticated. In fact, the only intelligence that the country had in wartime was its cavalry, which has gone by the boards. But the cavalry was always the eyes and the ears of the Army and the Navy, and consequently were the eyes and the ears of the country.

We've come a long way in terms of intelligence in a hundred years. We've come up with some questions about morality in intelligence. But notwithstanding the fact that we do have questions, we do need intelligence. And it's my pleasure and honor to introduce to you this morning the eyes and ears of our country and one of our best and one of our very brightest, Admiral Stansfield Turner.

[Applause.]

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Thank you, J.D. Thank all of you for being here. And I thank the Atlanta City Forum Board for inviting me to open this exciting new endeavor here in your wonderful city of Atlanta.

I've only been to your city twice before in my life. And each time I've learned that Atlanta produces winners. And I'm sure this just is going to be the same, and the Forum is going to prove to be a great winner for your city.

Unfortunately, I resented the fact that I found a winner here in 1944 when I came down with the Navy football team to play Georgia Tech. We were three touchdown favorites when we went in and two point losers when we left. I was very pleased, however, when I came in 1974 and called on your then Governor and he told me that two days later he was going to announce that he was running for the presidency of the United States. And I was very pleased when that turned out to be a true prediction. I was very honored last February when he appointed me to this post, which I assumed officially on the 9th of March. And in the seven months, almost, since that day, I have spent a lot of my time, as J.D. intimated, looking at the past activities of our intelligence organization.

Now I'm not here with you this morning either to attempt to bury or praise the past. But I would like to say that the process of exploring what has happened in the history of our intelligence operations makes those of us in charge of them today very determined to assure that the mistakes, or the perception of the mistakes in the past, do not reoccur. We're not just concerned with what history will say about us or our agencies. We are persuaded that the intelligence apparatus of our country cannot serve that country well unless it understands and is in tune with the attitudes, the values, the morals, the ethics of the people of this country.

Now, you may well ask me, and quite understandably, can you maintain an effective intelligence operation for the United States of America and, at the same time, attempt to match the moral attitudes and standards of the people of the country? And that's a good and difficult question. And I would start by saying there are two particular problems that we face in making this match between morality and the necessary secrecy of an intelligence operation.

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The first problem is that it's not easy to pin down just what the moral and ethical standards the country expects intelligence to adhere to really are. And those standards do change with time. You're going to hear Ambassador Sol Linowitz on the 2nd of December. Look at the difference in the way Ambassadors Linowitz and Bunker negotiated this current treaty with the Panamanians on a strictly bilateral basis of equality and what we did in 1903 when we signed a treaty not with the Panamanians, but with Frenchmen, to give us the right to a canal in Panama. And we did it while the Panamanian delegation was somewhere between New York and Washington trying to scurry to the negotiating table.

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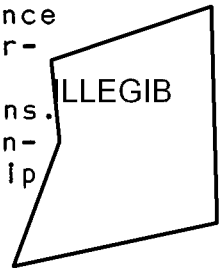
I'm just saying that our attitudes and what we feel is proper and moral in foreign affairs does vary over time.

The second problem that we have is simply that when you are trying to decide whether an intelligence operation is in accord with what the country wants, because almost all intelligence operations are secretive you can't go and try it out on the public. You can't put a feeler out and see whether it's going to be acceptable. So that puts a particular onus on us to use our judgment, to try to sense what the people want and what they not only want today, but what they're going to want tomorrow, because we must be concerned not only with attitudes today, but with what people will say when they look from the perspective or 1987 and 1997.

Now, of course, we have help in setting our standards and our procedures. We have help from the Congress; we have help from the President, and we have help from other branches of the executive branch of the government, like the Attorney General. For instance, when we're dealing in the rights of American citizens, we have some very specific guidelines. We have, on the one hand, some laws; laws, for instance, about wiretapping. There's an article in your Constitution this morning about the Senate Judiciary Committee has made one more step in approving a new wiretap law which this administration has submitted to the Congress; a law which we think goes further in balancing the proper equities between the individual's rights to privacy and the government's right or need to get information under certain circumstances.

Over and above the law, or in addition to the law, I should say, we have directives from the President. For instance, we have

a clear order from the President that no member of the intelligence community of our country will contemplate, plan or in any way participate in an assassination of anybody, anyplace. And beyond presidential regulations, we have our own intelligence regulations. The CIA, for instance, has a very clear regulation about relationships with the media. We do not have any contractual relationship with accredited members of the American media. We do not use media people as agents.



But at the same time, I would emphasize that we look upon and we treat the American media as citizens, and we think they have the same rights as every citizen to share with their government information which they may have that they want to pass on because they feel it's valuable to their government. And I find nothing improper or nothing jeopardizing the freedom of the press in having this kind of sharing where they give us things that they know and, in turn, as we have for many years, we share with them unclassified information that will be of value to them.

There are other cases like this. We have a CIA regulation that prohibits any contractual relationship with clergy, missionaries. But again, we treat the reverend as a citizen. And if he wants voluntarily to come in and tell us something that's important to his country that he wants to share and help with, we're happy to hear from him.

A more difficult area is our relations with academe, because we do have to have contractual relationships with members of the academic profession. If we ask a professor to write up a paper, to do some research, to be a consultant, for instance, he's entitled to some reimbursement. So we do have contractual relationships here. And I think that there's a danger in the academic world today, because there are some who believe that any kind of a relationship between the academic community and the intelligence community is improper. And because this view has been held in some areas, the relationships between our intelligence world and our academic world have narrowed in recent years.

I'm dedicated to trying to increase those in the years ahead.

I'd like to elaborate on that for a moment, because it's not only important, but it's controversial. Let me say that the last thing that I ever want to do is in any way interfere with the teaching process, the curricula or the methods of teaching on our campuses, or to in any way tarnish the image of the American academic community.

So we will not enter into paid or unpaid relationships with academics which would in any way prejudice their teaching responsibilities. Nor will we deliberately use the academic status

of anyone as a way of covering up our intelligence activities. But within these limits there is still lots of room, in my opinion, for healthy and proper relationships between these two organizations; relationships that need not in any way jeopardize the credibility or the authenticity of our academic endeavors.

Let me give an example. Recently, I asked a Sovietologist from a prominent campus to give us some help in analyzing some questions about the Soviet Union's behavior. Now, I think it would be a great shame if he were inhibited from doing that by irresponsible pressures from within the academic community. This man can come to us and provide a new perspective, new insight into the situation in the Soviet Union. He can stimulate us. He can keep us from getting into a bureaucratic rut of thinking in the same way all the time. And yet at the same time, he can go back to his campus afterward, I think a broader man with deeper insight because of the information that he will receive when he's working with us. He will get a deeper understanding, I believe, of the process of the Soviet government, and certainly a deeper understanding of the process of how decisions are made in the American government, because they are not always made like the textbooks on the campuses say.

So I think that there is an area of mutual benefit. And there are other ways in which this can be a two-way street.

An interesting one that happened to come to my attention the other day concerns archeology. Archeologists are frequently inhibited frm going to places of great archeological value, either because of political barriers or pure geographic barriers. But aerial photography taken for intelligence purposes often can reveal more about an archeological site than you can find even if you can get there on the ground. Traces of walls, traces of cities destroyed by time or the ravages of war are frequently apparent from photography. And we have lots of that. What a shame it would be if we could not share this with the archeologists of our country because of overly rigid rules by our academic community.

Well, let me say that in the United States and in respect to United States citizens, your country's intelligence activities are carefully circumscribed by law, presidential directives and internal regulations. I believe these protect our citizens as well as we possibly can.

Now, when we look to our overseas activities -- and intelligence is almost exclusively an overseas activity -- the problem of reflecting our nation's moral values in our intelligence operations becomes much more a judgmental question. We have to look at the trade-offs very judiciously as we go about our business.

In an open society like ours, there is no problem sensing the trends of politics, understanding the economic posture and

generally being able to predict what a country's going to do. You can do that by your contacts with friends, by reading the newspapers and watching TV and generally keeping your eyes and ears open. But when we deal with a closed society, like the Soviet Union, it's an entirely different matter. And I would suggest to you very briefly that it's critical we know something about what is going on in a closed society, a closed society like the Soviet Union in particular, where they have literally the capability to devastate our country and its society with intercontinental ballistic missile weapons. We've got to know something of what's going on there to be prepared. And we're working hard today to develop strategic arms limitations so that we will reduce the risk of any kind of an intercontinental war. And yet we must have some idea whether those people are living up to the terms of those agreements. We must be able to see a little bit about what's going on in that closed society.

And let me say that this need to peer inside a closed society like this is much broader than just military matters. Remember back in '72 when the Soviets suddenly, unexpectedly and massively entered the world grain market and perturbed the economic situation in our country and in a number of others. We simply have to have some window onto these kinds of activities that are shrouded from us and from the rest of the world.

Still, the benefits of gaining this vital kind of intelligence must be weighed against our fundamental desire, as a country, to act with respect to other countries openly and honestly and to treat their citizens with the same sense of respect as we do our own. The question then is when does the need for good information outweigh the desire of our country to reflect American values in all that we do. The clandestine, the secret gathering of intelligence is a very special matter. It's a tool that has to be used sparingly. Consequently, we must always weigh whether there's a possibility of getting the information we need through overt or less risky methods.

I assure you that with all of the new, wonderful technical means available to us today, however, the traditional, the historic clandestine spying operation continues to be an absolutely essential arrow in our quiver of intelligence collection capabilities. And I believe it will remain so for many, many years into the future. So we must make very careful judgments as to the lengths we will go in such clandestine activity in gathering information. Where do the limits of pragmatism get overridden by -- I mean, where does pragmatism override idealism in the conduct of such operations? Who is to determine how far we will go in clandestine actvities?

I mentioned at the beginning that we face this difficult quandary that we cannot subject ourselves to adequate public scrutiny or oversight, because we must remain largely secretive. So I think what we have to do is to develop a surrogate process for public

oversight. And I would suggest that in the years of scrutiny and criticism that we have just gone through with respect to our intelligence activities, out of that is evolving today this process of oversight. And let me cite a number of ways that have developed to give us that kind of surrogate public oversight.

One is the intense interest which your President and Vice President show in the intelligence process, that each spend a great deal of time on it and dedicate a lot of thought to it. Another is that a year and a half ago the United States Senate established a special select committee just on intelligence. And they have done, in my view, a splendid job of overseeing. They look into what we're doing. They get our deepest secrets. They work with us very closely. But it is not a fraternal relationship; it's one of oversight and supervision.

And I'm very pleased that in August, the House of Representatives created a similar select committee, and we're just beginning to work with it. And in point of fact, your congressman from Atlanta, Bryce Fowler, is a member of that committee. And I happened to meet with him on Tuesday morning, because he has been assigned to the subcommittee for evaluation. And by that, we mean that that subcommittee will evaluate how well we are doing our intelligence collection and evaluation operations. They will write a scorecard on us, a report card on us. And that can indeed be one of the most valuable functions of the committee.

Another form of outside oversight is a law which requires that if we enter into what is known as covert action -- this is not intelligence collection. Covert action is the attempt to influence events in another country without attribution. It's the area where, of course, the intelligence world has been criticized the most in years past. But the law now says that if we are going to undertake a covert action on behalf of our country, the President must sign off on it, and I must then notify eight committees of Congress. And if you don't think that's inhibiting, why....

[Laughter.]

Still another form of oversight is what's known as the Intelligence Oversight Board. President Carter recently renewed its charter, appointed three fine, distinguishd citizens to it -- Governor Scranton, Senator Gore and a Mr. Tom Farmer. And this board has only one responsibility. It's to check on the legality and the propriety of what we in the intelligence world are doing. You, any member of the intelligence community, may write to this board and say "That fellow Turner, he's really off the deep end. You better look into him." It doesn't go through me, and the board reports only to the President what it finds in that kind of a case.

Now let me be very honest with you. There are risks

in all of this oversight, two that bother me in particular. One is the danger of adopting intelligence by timidity or intelligence by least-common-denominator agreement. It's easy when the sequence of people overseeing our activities, those who approve what we are doing, to simply say, no, let's not take that risk. It's difficult to make those tough decisions, to accept the risk sometimes.

And the second danger is that as we go through this process of oversight and proliferate the number of people who know what we're doing, we have a danger of leaks. Now either one of these can be serious. But I would say to you in sincerity today that I believe we are working out a satisfactory balance between the risks of oversight and the benefits of oversight. But I would also say that these procedures are -- some of them -- quite new. And the next several years are going to be very important to the our intelligence process as these settle down and we find that equilibrium, that balance between risk and benefit. And until that's settled, I can't guarantee you how it's going to come out. I'm optimistic, and there's very much of a spirit of good will in all of this. And everybody I've worked with, from Congress' side, on the executive branch's side, is determined that we will maintain, as we absolutely must, a strong intelligence capability for our country, but to do so within the limits of what you, the people of the country, want in terms of morality and propriety.

And to do the latter, we are now in the midsts of attempting to share with you, the public, more, be more open with you, more about what the process of intelligence is, how we go about our business, and also more about the product of intelligence -- the evaluations, the estimates that we make. We've released a number of these recently; things like the energy study, the world steel market studies, studies on international terrorism. These are all things where we felt we could come to an unclassified level and still have a meaningful product to share with the American public. And we hope that out of this process of sharing will come a number of important benefits.

But the most important one, I think, relates to the point I made at the beginning, that we have to find, as difficult as it is, what the standards are that the society wants us to adhere to. And I think by sharing more with the public and staying in touch with our society more, we can be closer to doing that.

And out of this I hope to see two principal benefits come to our country. The first will be a greater contribution by the public to the shaping of the morals and the standards by which we conduct our intelligence. And the second will be a greater contribution by the intelligence community to the public in understanding the major issues that are up for debate before it. What is more important to our democracy than a good public dialogue? We

hope we will help with that.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Q: Admiral Turner, have we ever discovered why the Russians were bombarding our Embassy in Moscow with microwaves? And are they still doing that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, we've not discovered exactly why they're doing that. And, yes, they are still doing it. They have reduced the level of radiation.

You probably couldn't hear the question. The question was, have we discovered why the Soviets have been bombarding our Embassy in Moscow with microwaves, and are they still doing it?

Yes, they're still doing it. We're not entirely sure why they are doing it. They have reduced the level of radiation to a point that we don't believe is injurious to human beings. But it does cause us concern. We think it may be related to some way of getting information back out, some reflection of sounds or signals that are going on inside the Embassy; maybe as simple as a typewriter punching. We just don't know.

Q: Admiral Turner, there's been some speculation the Soviet...

[Rest of question inaudible.]

ADMIRAL TURNER: The Soviet strategic strategy based on achieving a war-winning capability?

I believe there's a fundamental difference in outlook between the Soviet Union and ourselves with respect to strategic nuclear warfare. I believe the Soviet Union, a country that's been invaded historically, looks upon any form of war as something they must plan for from beginning to its ultimate end. And they think through the entire processes of strategic nuclear war.

We are so determined there not be one and put so much emphasis on deterrents that we think really to deterrence and not exactly how we're going to pick ourselves up out of the rubble and go on if there were such a war.

I don't think that that makes the Soviets intent on having a strategic nuclear war. I think that's part of their psychology: to think it through and to build the forces that would fight a nuclear war. We are, in fact, building those forces too, but we don't think that's true. We don't talk about that con-

sequence as they do. And I'm not suggesting we're doing it wrong or they're doing it right. I'm suggesting these are different attitudes and approaches that have their roots in our different cultures.

[End of tape.]

UNION LEAGUE CLUB
New York City
5 October 1977

Speech is ame as one given at Atlanta City Forum
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COUNCIL ~~FOR~~ ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
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